

Keeping the Ice Pond clear

Students team with conservationists to destroy Knotweed

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HAMPTON — A group of local students are tearing up the Japanese Knotweed that is once again infesting town-owned land at the Ice Pond on Woodland Road.

The group, calling themselves "Earthkeepers," began working at the pond last Wednesday, May 13 and will continue do so periodically throughout the summer.

Earthkeepers is a group of middle and high school students under the umbrella of Seacoast Youth Services of Seabrook, a program of City Year.

"It's a big help," Jay Diener of the Hampton Conservation Commission. "If they didn't do it, it wouldn't be done. Japanese Knotweed is becoming a huge problem at the pond. It spreads incredibly fast and it will take over everything."

Seacoast Youth Services did a lot of work last year to cut down the invasive plant, but it's back again this year, he said.

"They were a huge help last year," Diener said. "It got so bad that you couldn't even see the pond from Woodland Road."

The Earthkeepers, Diener said, were looking for a new community project and asked if they could help out at the Ice Pond.

He said Japanese Knotweed began growing at the pond several years ago. The plant is a narrow form of bamboo that thrives in this area and continues to grow vigorously until it reaches up to 10 feet in height.

"It's not a good plant to have," he said. "We can't use a weed killer on it because (the plant exists) in the wetland's buffer, so we have to find other means to at least control it if not kill it."

Diener said the Earthkeepers are working to dig up the roots, as well as trying to kill the plants by smothering them with plastic sheeting.

"They are trying to block the sunlight and water to see if it helps," Diener said.

The Earthkeepers received a grant from Youth Ventures to aid in their work at pond. In addition to controlling the spread of invasive plants, they will assist in installing trails, and have proposed building and installing a bench, bird feeders and bat houses to control mosquitoes in the area.

They are also researching the history of Ice Pond with the intention of creating educational signage at the site.